

VZCZCXRO7722  
OO RUEHROV  
DE RUEHJM #0141 0151431  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 151431Z JAN 09  
FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3858  
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 000141

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, M FOR DIRECTOR GENERAL THOMAS; NSC  
FOR ABRAMS/PASCUAL/RAMCHAND

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/15/2019  
TAGS: [AFSN](#) [KWBG](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [KPAO](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: CONGEN FSN EMPLOYEE PLEADS FOR EMERGENCY  
ASSISTANCE AS IDF POUNDS GAZA CITY

REF: A. JERUSALEM 138  
[B](#). JERUSALEM 132

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: PD FSN Essam Mattar called PD Chief from Gaza City by phone January 15 and begged for assistance to be evacuated from Gaza. He had fled earlier in the day from his home, which was destroyed by Israeli rocket fire, seeking shelter from Israeli military operations raging in his neighborhood of Tel al-Hawa, south Gaza City (ref A). Mattar said he and his family could see Israeli tanks from where they were sheltering, and that they feared for their safety. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) At 1125 local time January 15, PD FSN Essam Mattar, resident in Gaza, telephoned the PD Jerusalem office, pleading for assistance. He said Israeli rocket fire had destroyed his house, and he, his wife, and children had fled, taking nothing with them. "It was a miracle no one was killed," he said. "My home is completely destroyed." Mattar lives in Tel al-Hawa and has been alternating between his home and his parents' home, closer to the center of Gaza City, depending on the tempo of fighting.

[1](#)3. (C) Mattar said he was sheltering temporarily with three other families in Bourj al-Ashral tower. However, he said, that location was also being hit by Israeli shelling, and he could see Israeli tanks from there. Mattar said he had not seen any Hamas fighters or signs of street fighting.

[1](#)4. (C) Mattar begged PD chief for ICRC assistance to extricate him and his family from the fighting. He said he fears for the safety of his family and is terrified to move without protection. He described the situation as "very, very, very bad."

[1](#)5. (C) Note: Mattar has declined ConGen offers of evacuation from Gaza over the years, always choosing to stay put. "Gaza is my home," he has said in the past. Since December 27, Mattar has turned down repeated offers to be added to a list of non-Amcit USG employees and their dependents for which post is seeking safe passage from Gaza to the West Bank. This time was the first that Mattar has shown fear or panic. End note.

[1](#)6. (C) Gaza ICRC contacts told ConGen that given intense fighting in Gaza City, ICRC's movements are limited, and they cannot assist Mattar. PD will offer Mattar use of the PD office in Gaza for shelter if he believes it is safe to move.

Note: American Corner Director Awni Karzon declined the same offer on January 14 (ref B) after he visited the office location. Karzon said the neighborhood in which the PD office is located was completely deserted, and he feared he would be too isolated if he or his family needed help. End note.

17. (C) Karzon told PD Chief that "today (January 15) is totally different" from previous days, and that people are extremely fearful and panicked. He said IDF troops were 500 meters from the neighborhood where he has sought shelter in South Remal, just north of Tel al-Hawa. He expressed concern about those who have already fled their homes, wondering where they, and he, will go now.

WALLES